STREET SPIRIT

Justice News & Homeless Blues in the Bay Area • 1995–2022

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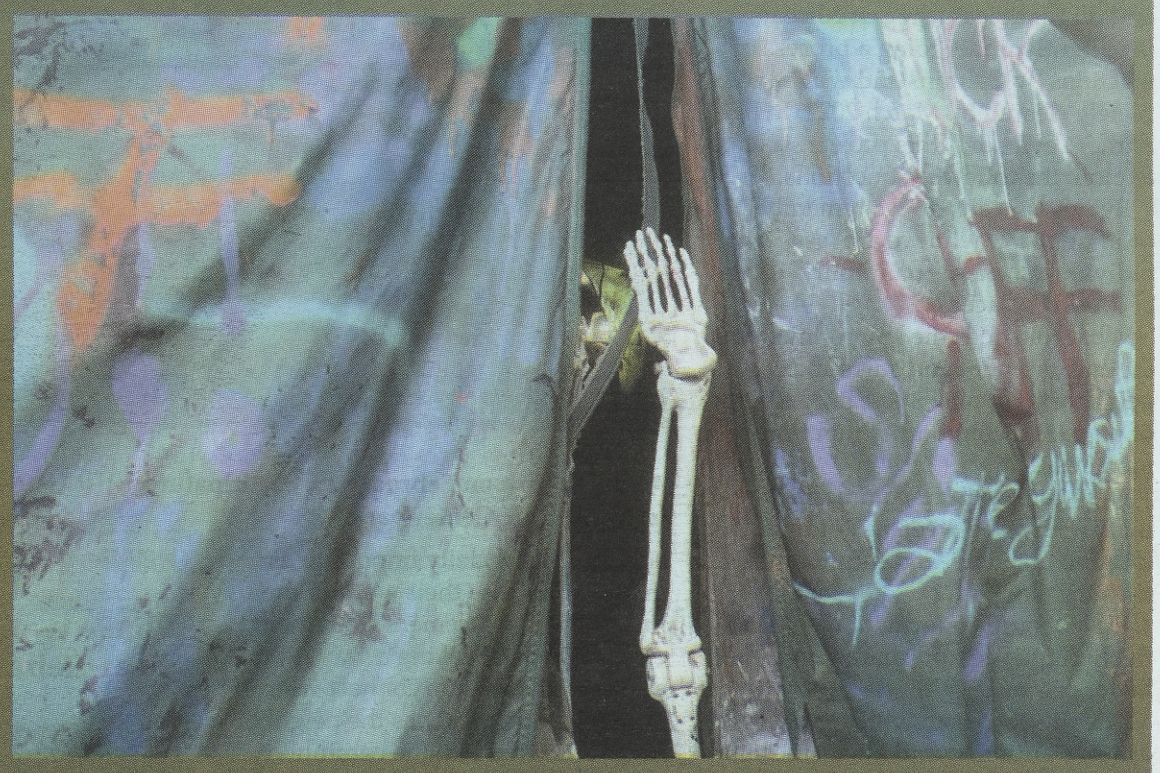
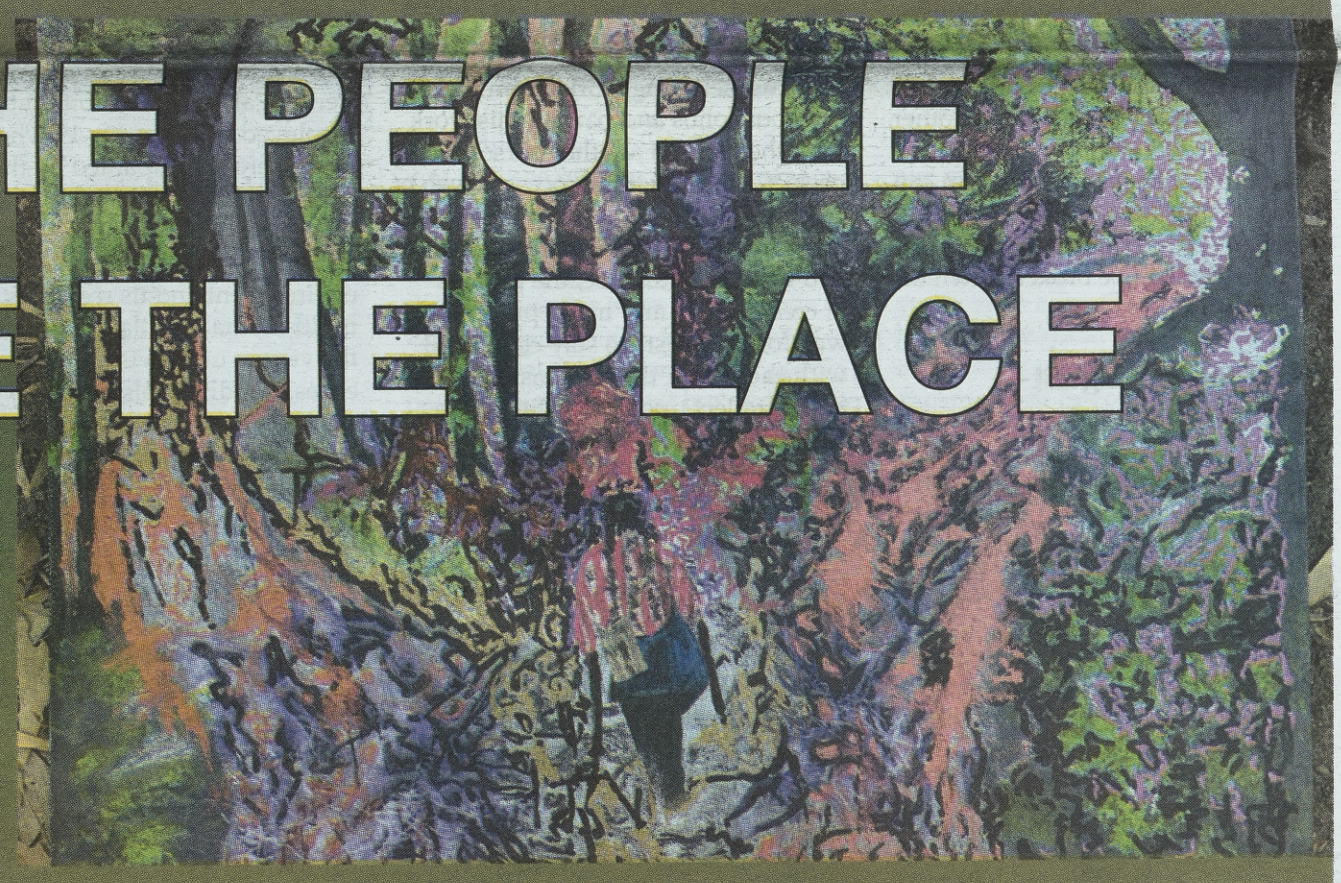


THE PEOPLE ARE THE PLACE



Original artwork by the following artists (top to bottom, left to right): Raymond Leichter, Ashley Frankum, Laura Berry, D'artagnan Lloyd, Brandon "Grimm" Mercer, and Patrick Thomas

'The people are the place': project description

By Suzi Garner

Mark Leong

At the exhibit on February 19, partitipating artist D'artagnan Lloyd sets up a sculpture he made out of found materials in MLK Civic Center park.

THE PEOPLE ARE THE PLACE is a multi media community art project undertaken by eight artists living in the Berkeley/Emeryville area,: D'artagnan "D'art" Lloyd, Ashley Frankum, Brandon "Grimm" Mercer, Raymond "Ray" Leichter, Patrick "Pat" Thomas, Laura Berry, John Benson, and Suzi Garner. Six of the participating artists are current or former residents of the Ashby/Shellmound encampment located at the I-80 interchange. This encampment area, occupied by unhoused individuals on and off for at least the last 20 years, is currently undergoing a process of evictions by Caltrans and will be completely cleared by March 2022. In light of these evictions, this project seeks to explore the following questions:

By what means do we remember or understand who we are (as artists, individuals, and a community) if we become displaced?

What role does the environment of the encampment and surrounding neighborhood play in creating a sense of place and community for encampment residents?

How can the intra-community relationships between individuals, creative practices, and the environment be mapped?

How can this information be effectively conveyed and shared with the larger community?

The project began with a group of artists wanting to find a way to share their artwork with the larger community. This artwork had nearly all been *created while living in the Ashby/Shellmound encampment community*, often with artists inspiring each other. As project collaborator D'artagnan Lloyd put it, "It's kind of a group consciousness. You can see the influence of your own art reflected back to you."

The project can be broken down into three phases:

Phase one (August-December 2021)

Using video and photography, art created by the six artists from Ashby/Shellmound is extensively documented. This is especially important as many artists lose their work in the process of displacement from their encampments. Seeking a way for the artists to continue to connect with each other creatively as the neighborhood is cleared and the community dispersed, the project has undertaken to create an interconnected map of artworks. This consists of each participating artist selecting works from their own portfolios and pairing this work with the work of another person in the project. Through this process, a web of connections formed. While the reasons for pairing each work were personal and incredibly diverse, the process of creating this art "map" provided a way for the artists to stay connected with each other through inspiration and to reflect upon the value of the relationships and the environment at Ashby/Shellmound and its impact upon their own creative processes. This map can be found on the project website: *www.thepeopleareatheplace.org*

Phase two: (August 2021-February 12 2022)

Artists worked together to curate and create a 360-degree video projection installation. They projected their artwork onto the circle of trees surrounding the fountain within Civic Center Park in an exhibit that was displayed on February 19. The projections were accompanied by three kinetic sculptures, created by participating artists, which incorporate audio recordings of the Ashby/Shellmound environment and its residents. This multi-media installation will immerse the viewer in the visions and experiences of individuals currently or formerly living at the camp. The chosen location centers the creative expressions of this marginalized community within the civic heart of Berkeley.

Phase three: (October 2021-March 2022)

This phase began with walking the land and drawing maps. In collaboration with *Street Spirit*, each artist spent time walking the land of the Ashby/Shellmound camp, both before and after eviction, reflecting on the land and the people who have passed through it. In connection with these discussions, each artist created an individual drawn map of their knowledge, history, and patterns of use for the geographic area of the encampment. These maps are digitized, layered together, and collectively form both an artwork and an interactive document to highlight and preserve a community's intangible heritage that is lost at the time of eviction. This issue of *Street Spirit* is devoted to sharing these maps and accompanying reflections. An interactive version of the maps is also available on the project website.

Land acknowledgement

The Ashby/Shellmound encampment sits on Huichin, the home territory of Chochenyo-speaking Ohlone people, which stands on unceded Lisjan Ohlone land. The Ohlone community is not federally recognized, has no land base, and has been politically and economically marginalized. We recognize that *Street Spirit* and Youth Spirit Artworks, along with every member of the Berkeley community, has and continues to benefit from, the use and occupation of this land. Please join us in honoring the sacrifices and invaluable contributions made by the Indigenous culture bearers who came before us and are here now, including those with Indigenous heritage participating in this project.

Brandon "Grimm" Mercer

Grimm's art practice often involves taking and manipulating photos to represent his internal experience of the world.

Suzi Garner is a multimedia artist who uses recycled materials, light and shadow, and found or natural objects in her work. She is the facilitator of THE PEOPLE ARE THE PLACE, and often collaborates with community members in her practice..

D'artagnan "D'art" Lloyd

D'art's artwork focuses on kinetic sculpture made with found objects, as well as mask making and painting.

STOP!

Instructions: how to read this issue

THIS is an unusual issue of *Street Spirit*. We do not want you to interact with it like a normal newspaper. You'll be pulling it apart, turning it upside down, and reading backwards. It will be easy and fun, as long as you read the following instructions.

STEP 1

Read page 2 (to the left) and page 3 (this page: hello, welcome).

STEP 2

Flip right to the center spread—pages 6 and 7. Skip right past the next two pages, the ones that would normally be pages 4 and 5. You will return to those, we promise.

STEP 3

When you get to page six, you'll see a large and plain Google Maps image of a highway offramp and some surrounding roads. This is the site of the Ashby/Shellmound encampment. Pull this sheet out of the newspaper and hold it up to the light.

STEP 4

Holding this page up to the light, you will see pins on the map accompanied by text boxes. These pins and text boxes are printed on the opposite side of the page and backwards, so that you can see them through the Google Maps image. Each of these six pins was placed by one of the participating artists. The text boxes describe the significance of the pinned site. Read these through the newsprint as you hold it up to the light, and notice where they fall on the Google Maps image.

You will also be able to see hand-drawn lines. These are the annotations that each artist made on their personal map, describing how they used the land while they lived there: where they lived, how they traveled around, and which places felt special. Though you may not be able to read their annotations, notice where their drawings fall on the map. Pay attention to the commonly used areas, as well as the places that seem to have held special meaning to individuals.

STEP 5

Turn the sheet of paper over in your hands so that you can see the hand-drawn map and the pins. Look harder at the hand-drawn maps. See if you can make out the handwriting that describes each marking. If you hold the newsprint up to the light again, you will see the Google Maps image from the other side. Play with the ways in which these maps help to contextualize each other in physical and psychological space.

STEP 6

When you are finished, fold up the center spread and set it aside. Do not place it back within the newspaper.

On the two facing pages you have open (pages 8 and 9) you will find an article about the encampment and our motivation for documenting it with maps. Read it (no special tricks here).

STEP 7

Turn the page as you would in a normal newspaper. On page 10 you will find a Google satellite image of *the encampment space from above.* Rotate the page clockwise. The land has been filled in with quotes from our interviews with each of the participating artists. The quotes are all in different colors: one color per quote. If you get lost, let these colors guide your eyes. Or just be lost, and enjoy the ways in which each fragment helps to paint a picture of the encampment in your mind.

STEP 8

The facing page to the right (page 11) contains two painted maps of the encampment from above, one by D'artagnan Lloyd and the other by Ashley Frankum. Take some time to look at those and read the captions beneath.

STEP 9

Turn the page as you would in a normal newspaper. Page 12 contains updates about each artist. If you want to engage more with THE PEOPLE ARE THE PLACE, check out the website: *www.thepeopelaretheplace.org.*

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Alastair Boone
Editor in Chief

JC Orton
Vendor Coordinator

Do you have a tip, or feedback about the paper? Please email us at streetspiritnews@gmail.com

The Ashby/Shellmound encampment

By Alastair Boone

What makes a place?

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CLAIMING physical space is a job often guarded by the powers that be. A small number of powerful people (colonizers, politicians, billionaires) decide how land is used, who gets to live where, and what life feels like when you settle in. Some of these decisions end up in history books. Others are covered up or lost to the landscape of time. But each has a human toll, and homelessness and displacement are frequent results—a product of policymaking, urban planning, or powerful interests that favor a select few.

By definition, homelessness occurs when you lose your technical claim to place. To a place. You lose your home—the physical space the law defines as "yours." As a result, unhoused people make home in the spaces that are left over. They settle in the areas in between: on city blocks designed to carry you from somewhere to somewhere else, under bridges that connect cities, on scraps of liminal space that surround highways, landfills, and bodies of water. These are parts of urban geography that are deemed "uninhabitable." They are designed to be dead space that supports the infrastructure that carries us between the places that we are meant to live.

The Ashby/Shellmound encampment is one of those places. Residents live on several grassy islands created by a tangle of offramps and highways where Berkeley meets Emeryville. Abutting Aquatic Park and the greater San Francisco Bay, the natural landscape grows wild between the harsh concrete roads. Egrets and herons land around the eucalyptus trees that line the offramps. Birds chirp between long, loud bursts of construction noise and the ear-splitting horns of trains and large trucks.

I spent the last few months speaking with six former residents of the Ashby/Shellmound encampment: D'artagnan Lloyd, Ashley Frankum, Brandon "Grimm" Mercer, Raymond Leichter, Patrick Thomas, and Laura Berry. Each person is a pillar of the encampment community they built (affectionately referred to by Berry as "Camp Offramp"). In all of my interviews, I asked people to close their eyes and map the camp as it exists in their minds. I asked them to describe landmarks of the physical space as well as the social and emotional connections that defined it.

When you make home in a place that you are not "supposed" to go, I learned, you start completely new. Moving away from an established physical geography forces you to abandon the established cultural geography as well. You build the rules. You form relationships that are raw—based on people, not wider social contracts. You construct a government that works to serve the needs of individuals. Having lost your hold in society—or having let go of it on purpose—life is no longer structured around the attitudes and activities that are required to maintain claim to a certain type of place. Instead, inside the liminal space, there is room to build something that fits.

This issue is intended to capture the memories of the participating artists, five of whom have been evicted from the space over the last year. Government agencies have subjected the encampment to a slow series of sweeps, which began in April 2021 and could culminate during the final weeks of this month. This project does not aim to speak for every person who has lived at Ashby/Shellmound—the residents who are not featured outnumber those who worked on this issue. Instead, we wanted to map what remains in the minds of these six people as the encampment is disbanded bit by bit. With newsprint, we are hoping to stake out a little bit of physical space for a community that will soon only exist in memory.

The Indigenous history of Ashby/Shellmound

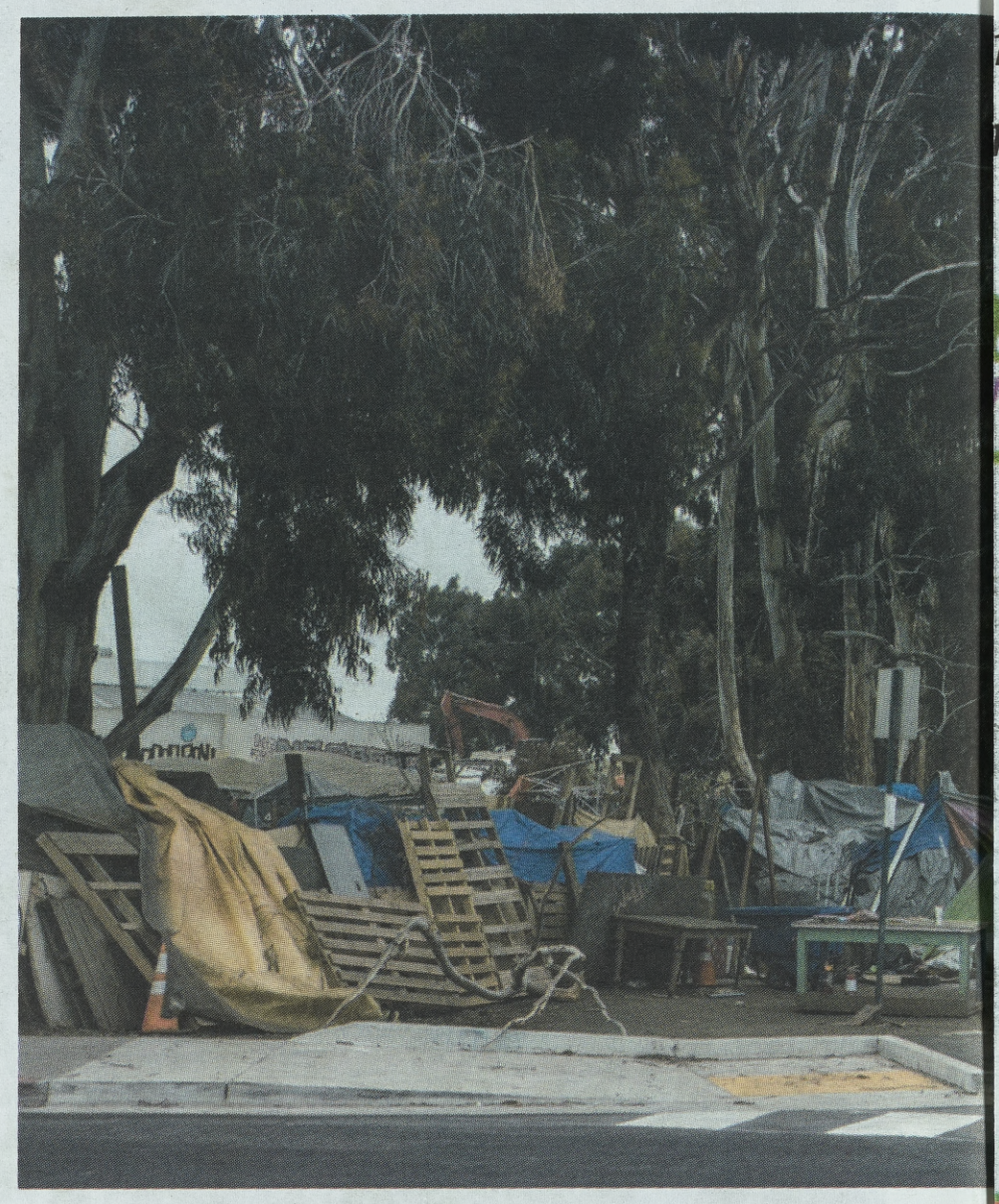
"It's a wonder of the world. It's a place that we should preserve. It's not intact above the ground, but underneath, it's there—it still holds our people."

—Corrina Gould, Lisjan Ohlone

5,000 years before these six artists built their encampment, the land was part of the West Berkeley Shellmound—a sacred site for the Ohlone. Ohlone people spent centuries constructing the Shellmound out of abalone, mussels, clamshells, and other staples of their diet. They buried their ancestors there and built villages around it. Over the centuries, it grew to be over twenty feet high and hundreds of feet long. It was the largest of over 400 mounds around what we now call the San Francisco Bay, a hallowed and integral part of the first human settlement along its shores.

The Shellmound was razed in the 1800s to make way for an amusement park, a dance pavilion, and a racetrack. Later, what was left was destroyed to accommodate the development of Emeryville as an industrial site. From then on, the area was in private hands.

The only remaining undeveloped portion of this heritage site, which currently rests beneath a parking lot, is currently slated to be demolished to make way for the 1900 Fourth Street project: a proposed retail and housing development. The new development would be six stories high and require the excavation of two acres of land for a basement parking garage.



The Shellmound Street segment of the encampment community in April, 2021—which said the group needed to move to make room for construction on a 186-un

Family bands of the contemporary Ohlone community, which holds this site to be sacred, have been organizing a wide-ranging community campaign to preserve the area for years. Ohlone leaders have laid out an alternative vision for the space, which includes restoring native vegetation, building a dance arbor for ceremonial use, and creating a 40-foot high mound covered in California poppies with a path to the top, with a memorial and educational center contained within the mound.

The past and present of "Camp Offramp"

"Money and wealth are wonderful... at the same time, there's a lot of wealth in a different form in being homeless. There's a battery of, I want to say lessons, but that's really not it… You create home. And for whatever it's worth, you don't have to be homeless alone. That's the biggest difference."

—Laura Berry

There was no clear beginning of the encampment at Ashby/Shellmound. Unhoused people have been living around the area for at least 20 years, some setting up roots and leaving at the command of city or state officials, others moving in and out of the area as they needed or desired.

The most recent iteration of the community began to take shape after the eviction of the encampment at the Albany Bulb in 2014. After residents of the Bulb were forced to disband, some moved to the Gilman Street underpass or the University Avenue exit along I-80. Others landed around Ashby/Shellmound.

Driving north on I-80, Ashby/Shellmound is Exit 10. You might take it if you want to drive up Ashby Avenue into South Berkeley, or take Shellmound Street to the Bay Street mall. The exit splits into a V-shape, which creates a long median in the shape of a crooked triangle. The segments of the area are owned by different jurisdictions: the City of Berkeley, the City of Emeryville, and Caltrans. Running parallel to Shellmound Street is the Union Pacific railway line, which carries trains traveling between 23 states west of Chicago and New Orleans.

Looking out toward the water, the land feels calm and beautiful. The patches of grass are green, and in certain places, flowers poke through.

"If you ever looked at a flower at dawn, looked at the sun coming up, you can actually see them open sometimes," D'artagnan Lloyd, who has a master's degree in plant and soil biology, remembers. "Knowing a bit about how the

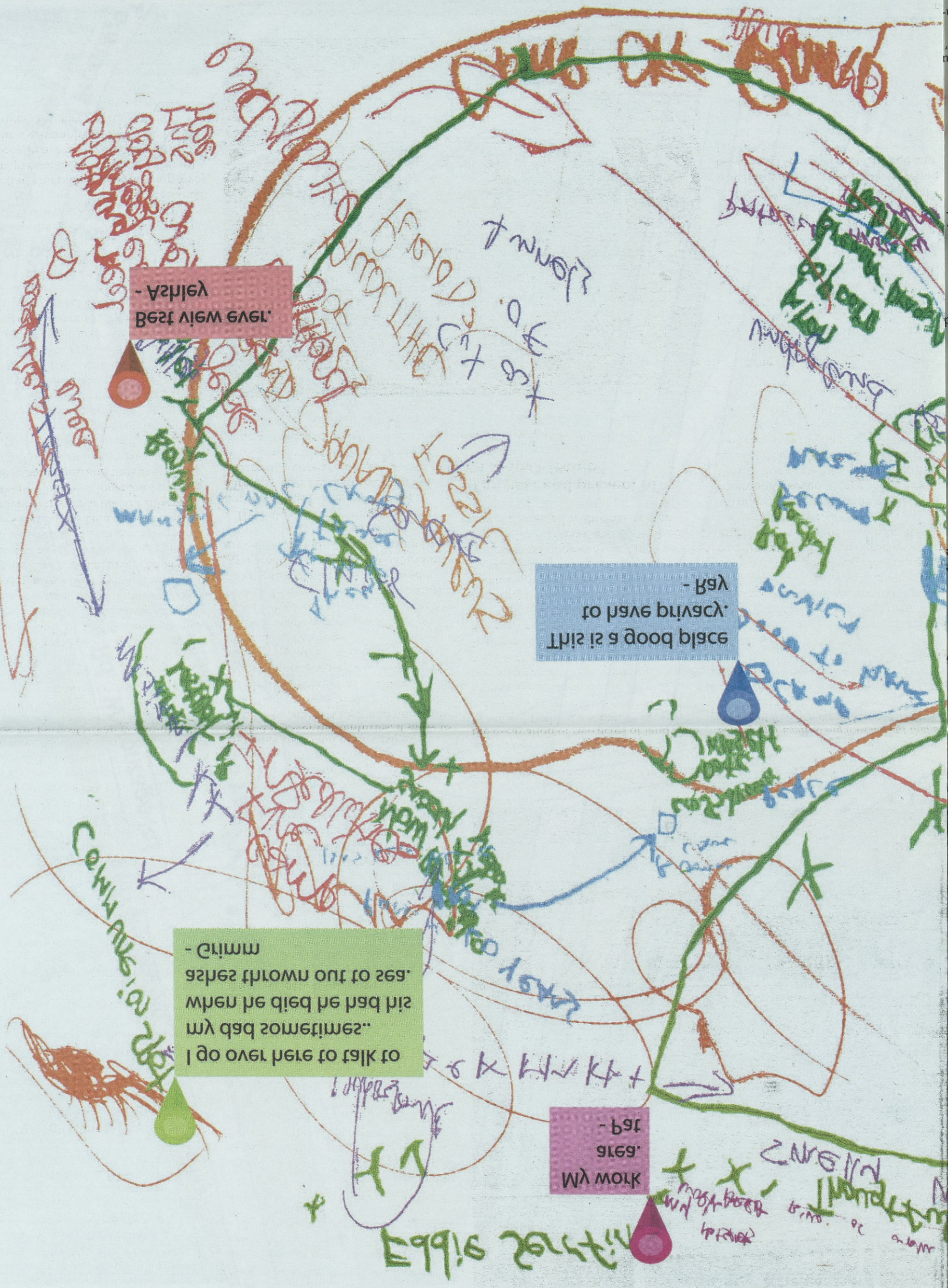
Raymond "Ray" Leichter

Ray creates sculpture and percussive instruments, such as this one, using objects from his environment. He describes Ashby/Shellmound as his artistic medium.

...n by the six participating artists

...nd tunnels, and areas where friends and neighbors set up their tents.

...ne at www.thepeoplearetheplace.org/interactive-map.



on the opposite page. These six maps were then superimposed to form the image you see above. Orange map by Laura Berry. Green map by Grimm Mercer. Red map by Ashley Frankum. Blue map by Ray Leichter. Purple map by D'art Lloyd. Pink map by Pat Thomas.

Personal maps and landmarks drawn by the six participating artists

The lines drawn below represent things like walking paths, underground tunnels, and areas where friends and neighbors set up their tents. You can find a non-backwards version of this map online at www.thepeopleretheplace.org/interactive-map.

Six hand-drawn maps that the participating artists drew on individual sheets of vellum that were placed on top of a transportation map, such as the one on the opposite page. These six maps were then superimposed to form the image you see above. Orange map by Laura Berry. Green map by Grimm Mercer. Red map by Ashley Frankum. Blue map by Ray Leichter. Purple map by D'art Lloyd. Pink map by Pat Thomas.

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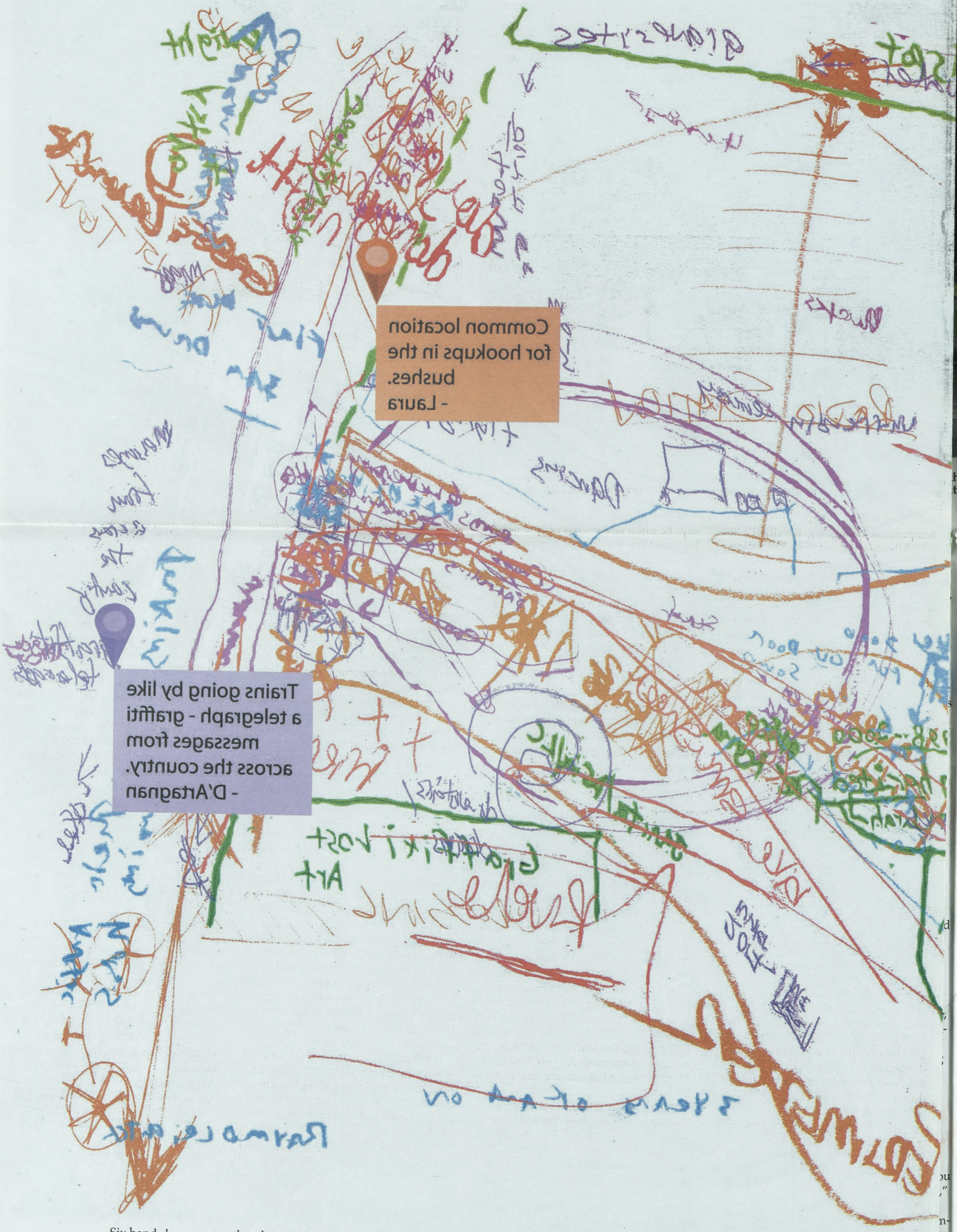

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community: space, place, and history

Mark Leong

he same month it received its first eviction notice from the City of Emeryville, t condo complex, which will include just eight semi-affordable units.

Patrick "Pat" Thomas

Pat draws and paints in a wide variety of scales and mediums, and found the Ashby/Shellmound environment inspiring and supportive in making his work both larger and better.

roots and the microbes also respond to temperature changes, generally it's like a breath on a piece of glass indicating life."

The bulk of the Ashby/Shellmound encampment was built on the Shellmound Street side, within the median, along the sidewalk that runs parallel to the offramp, and along Shellmound Street itself. At its peak it was home to 50 or 60 people, according to Ian Cordova Morales, president of Where Do We Go Berkeley—a grassroots advocacy group that works extensively in the area. Some of these folks started living there as early as 2014 after the Bulb was swept, and stayed on and off until as recently as last year.

"I've lived a lot of places, but I've never felt more at home than I do here," said Ashley Frankum, who has lived at Ashby/Shellmound on and off for over a year.

For an encampment to remain in place for so many years is very unusual and provides a unique opportunity for a community to stabilize. Residents set up a highly successful donation table, where cars sometimes lined up to drop off resources like tents and bottled water. This helped residents get needed resources and build a connection to the outside world.

"We went from being treated like society's garbage to being society's royalty for a while there," Laura Berry says. "We had people lined up to stop and donate, or to talk to us. I was getting to the point where I was waking up and doing interviews. Kids wanted to come meet and talk."

Service providers offered consistent medical care and ultimately moved a handful of people into housing. Residents fell in love and broke up. People began to deeply trust and look out for each other.

Grimm remembers walking around in the morning and distributing resources that he had gathered, or had been dropped off at the donation table. He says he often knew what people needed because they would talk to each other and ask for support.

"People would be willing to reach out to their neighbor... Because they knew me and they knew I wasn't going to steal from them. So it brought a little bit of honesty into a corrupted situation, which I thought was really cool."

"I like to help people, that's what we should be doing," he added. "The world owes us nothing—we owe each other the world. And without unity we're just going to fall to pieces here."

Another upside was the way the landscape helped people manage their mental health, Patrick Thomas says. Pat is a veteran, and says that the sounds at Ashby/Shellmound helped soothe him in moments when was experiencing PTSD flashbacks. Additionally, he says the calm of the encampment's surroundings helped people remember their priorities.

> *'The world owes us nothing—we owe each other the world.'*

"You got more people looking at you [in the heart of the city]. Especially if you have psychosis or different mental disorders, [you feel] judgment. Here, you don't have the people re-defining you. When you are by yourself out here and only have to worry about yourself, you're freer. You start concentrating on things that are more for you. You start to remember what you are, that helps a lot."

For this particular group, Ashby/Shellmound gave them the time and space to make artwork. The six people involved in the project are all prolific artists who often made work that was inspired by their community. D'art, for example, makes sculptures using found materials. Pat makes paintings that are often inspired by the colors of the natural landscape: the greens and blues of the trees and sky. D'art, too, was inspired by the green of their surroundings.

"It's not everywhere outside you get greenery. Sometimes it's all asphalt or concrete or gravel. The vibrance of that, [it's] a measurable blessing. A luxury item."

Ashley's art is playful and performative, using hand-painted props to create scenes. She used the inside of her tent as her canvas, over time surrounding herself in intricate swirls and patterns. Ray crafts metal disks out of found objects that he uses to make percussion music. He drums in harmony with the sounds of the area, including traffic and the undulating horn of trains that pass throughout the day and night.

The sounds of the encampment were one of Laura's favorite parts of Ashby/Shellmound, too.

"It was the comfort of sound. Of voices. There was the comfort of knowing that there are people there. That you're not alone," she said.

Laura's artwork often involves self-portraits using costumes and makeup. Grimm also uses photography as the root of his art, taking pictures of his environment and using filters to change the feeling of his subjects to match his interior view of the world.

Over time, the encampment was able to build a bridge to the greater Berkeley community, one that traveled both ways. Residents could plug into the art scene in the Bay Area, and housed people had the opportunity to stop and talk to encampment residents, ask questions, and learn about their lives.

"I felt part of the community, in a way… the greater Bay Area family of unhoused people, as well as the supporters from afar who came and bought my art, [and] gave me props from afar," D'art told me.

Last year, the presiding jurisdictions started to target the encampment. A series of government sweeps beginning in April 2021 have greatly diminished the community, which now numbers at around 11. Only those who live on the Caltrans parcels remain, protected by a lawsuit filed by Where Do We Go Berkeley in October 2021 that won residents six months to look for housing elsewhere. That six months ends on March 23, 2022. Pending further legal action, the remaining residents will likely be forced to leave shortly thereafter.

The bulk of the 50-some Ashby/Shellmound residents have already moved away. Some live in the Rodeway Inn, a Berkeley motel that the city stood up as transitional housing, which recently ran out of FEMA funding and is currently scheduled to close in late April or early May. A handful of residents have been housed. While some report that their housing feels comfortable and secure, others live far away in neighboring towns where they have no support system. One former resident, who is in a wheelchair, was housed on the second floor of a building with an elevator. The building has had two fires, and each time she has had to be carried down the stairs when the elevator shuts off.

Some former residents of Ashby/Shellmound currently live elsewhere on the street. Others died by overdose and others by suicide, according to their friends and former neighbors.

The effects of an encampment eviction, particularly when a place has become so established, can cut deep. But looking back, the community continues to offer some hope.

"There was just this time period on that corner that was absolutely so amazing, to see the individual growth," Laura Berry remembers.

"Becoming homeless in the first place...it was so scary. And I felt so alone. So the best part about Offramp was I think the fact that you're forced to understand one another and share resources. You learn to accept people for who they are and how they behave and what their beliefs are. Because you don't have these walls. This distance. You hear everything, you see a lot of things. I think that's the biggest thing. Learning that people really, with all their flaws... people will care when you give them the chance."

Alastair Boone is the Editor in Chief of Street Spirit.

The Ashby/Shellmound encampment co

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What makes a place?

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Family bands of the contemporary Ohlone community, which holds this site to be sacred, have been organizing a wide-ranging community campaign to preserve the area for years. Ohlone leaders have laid out an alternative vision for the space, which includes restoring native vegetation, building a dance arbor for ceremonial use, and creating a 40-foot high mound covered in California poppies with a path to the top, with a memorial and educational center contained within the mound.

The past and present of "Camp Offramp"

"Money and wealth are wonderful... at the same time, there's a lot of wealth in a different form in being homeless. There's a battery of, I want to say lessons, but that's really not it… You create home. And for whatever it's worth, you don't have to be homeless alone. That's the biggest difference."

—Laura Berry

There was no clear beginning of the encampment at Ashby/Shellmound. Unhoused people have been living around the area for at least 20 years, some setting up roots and leaving at the command of city or state officials, others moving in and out of the area as they needed or desired.

The most recent iteration of the community began to take shape after the eviction of the encampment at the Albany Bulb in 2014. After residents of the Bulb were forced to disband, some moved to the Gilman Street underpass or the University Avenue exit along I-80. Others landed around Ashby/Shellmound.

Driving north on I-80, Ashby/Shellmound is Exit 10. You might take it if you want to drive up Ashby Avenue into South Berkeley, or take Shellmound Street to the Bay Street mall. The exit splits into a V-shape, which creates a long median in the shape of a crooked triangle. The segments of the area are owned by different jurisdictions: the City of Berkeley, the City of Emeryville, and Caltrans. Running parallel to Shellmound Street is the Union Pacific railway line, which carries trains traveling between 23 states west of Chicago and New Orleans.

Looking out toward the water, the land feels calm and beautiful. The patches of grass are green, and in certain places, flowers poke through.

"If you ever looked at a flower at dawn, looked at the sun coming up, you can actually see them open sometimes," D'artagnan Lloyd, who has a master's degree in plant and soil biology, remembers. "Knowing a bit about how the

Raymond "Ray" Leichter

Ray creates sculpture and percussive instruments, such as this one, using objects from his environment. He describes Ashby/Shellmound as his artistic medium.

ent community: space, place, and history

Mark Leong

il, 2021—the same month it received its first eviction notice from the City of Emeryville, a 186-unit condo complex, which will include just eight semi-affordable units.

Patrick "Pat" Thomas

Pat draws and paints in a wide variety of scales and mediums, and found the Ashby/Shellmound environment inspiring and supportive in making his work both larger and better.

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roots and the microbes also respond to temperature changes, generally it's like a breath on a piece of glass indicating life."

The bulk of the Ashby/Shellmound encampment was built on the Shellmound Street side, within the median, along the sidewalk that runs parallel to the offramp, and along Shellmound Street itself. At its peak it was home to 50 or 60 people, according to Ian Cordova Morales, president of Where Do We Go Berkeley—a grassroots advocacy group that works extensively in the area. Some of these folks started living there as early as 2014 after the Bulb was swept, and stayed on and off until as recently as last year.

"I've lived a lot of places, but I've never felt more at home than I do here," said Ashley Frankum, who has lived at Ashby/Shellmound on and off for over a year.

For an encampment to remain in place for so many years is very unusual and provides a unique opportunity for a community to stabilize. Residents set up a highly successful donation table, where cars sometimes lined up to drop off resources like tents and bottled water. This helped residents get needed resources and build a connection to the outside world.

"We went from being treated like society's garbage to being society's royalty for a while there," Laura Berry says. "We had people lined up to stop and donate, or to talk to us. I was getting to the point where I was waking up and doing interviews. Kids wanted to come meet and talk."

Service providers offered consistent medical care and ultimately moved a handful of people into housing. Residents fell in love and broke up. People began to deeply trust and look out for each other.

Grimm remembers walking around in the morning and distributing resources that he had gathered, or had been dropped off at the donation table. He says he often knew what people needed because they would talk to each other and ask for support.

"People would be willing to reach out to their neighbor... Because they knew me and they knew I wasn't going to steal from them. So it brought a little bit of honesty into a corrupted situation, which I thought was really cool."

"I like to help people, that's what we should be doing," he added. "The world owes us nothing—we owe each other the world. And without unity we're just going to fall to pieces here."

Another upside was the way the landscape helped people manage their mental health, Patrick Thomas says. Pat is a veteran, and says that the sounds at Ashby/Shellmound helped soothe him in moments when was experiencing PTSD flashbacks. Additionally, he says the calm of the encampment's surroundings helped people remember their priorities.

> *'The world owes us nothing—we owe each other the world.'*

"You got more people looking at you [in the heart of the city]. Especially if you have psychosis or different mental disorders, [you feel] judgment. Here, you don't have the people re-defining you. When you are by yourself out here and only have to worry about yourself, you're freer. You start concentrating on things that are more for you. You start to remember what you are, that helps a lot."

For this particular group, Ashby/Shellmound gave them the time and space to make artwork. The six people involved in the project are all prolific artists who often made work that was inspired by their community. D'art, for example, makes sculptures using found materials. Pat makes paintings that are often inspired by the colors of the natural landscape: the greens and blues of the trees and sky. D'art, too, was inspired by the green of their surroundings.

"It's not everywhere outside you get greenery. Sometimes it's all asphalt or concrete or gravel. The vibrance of that, [it's] a measurable blessing. A luxury item."

Ashley's art is playful and performative, using hand-painted props to create scenes. She used the inside of her tent as her canvas, over time surrounding herself in intricate swirls and patterns. Ray crafts metal disks out of found objects that he uses to make percussion music. He drums in harmony with the sounds of the area, including traffic and the undulating horn of trains that pass throughout the day and night.

The sounds of the encampment were one of Laura's favorite parts of Ashby/Shellmound, too.

"It was the comfort of sound. Of voices. There was the comfort of knowing that there are people there. That you're not alone," she said.

Laura's artwork often involves self-portraits using costumes and makeup. Grimm also uses photography as the root of his art, taking pictures of his environment and using filters to change the feeling of his subjects to match his interior view of the world.

Over time, the encampment was able to build a bridge to the greater Berkeley community, one that traveled both ways. Residents could plug into the art scene in the Bay Area, and housed people had the opportunity to stop and talk to encampment residents, ask questions, and learn about their lives.

"I felt part of the community, in a way… the greater Bay Area family of unhoused people, as well as the supporters from afar who came and bought my art, [and] gave me props from afar," D'art told me.

Last year, the presiding jurisdictions started to target the encampment. A series of government sweeps beginning in April 2021 have greatly diminished the community, which now numbers at around 11. Only those who live on the Caltrans parcels remain, protected by a lawsuit filed by Where Do We Go Berkeley in October 2021 that won residents six months to look for housing elsewhere. That six months ends on March 23, 2022. Pending further legal action, the remaining residents will likely be forced to leave shortly thereafter.

The bulk of the 50-some Ashby/Shellmound residents have already moved away. Some live in the Rodeway Inn, a Berkeley motel that the city stood up as transitional housing, which recently ran out of FEMA funding and is currently scheduled to close in late April or early May. A handful of residents have been housed. While some report that their housing feels comfortable and secure, others live far away in neighboring towns where they have no support system. One former resident, who is in a wheelchair, was housed on the second floor of a building with an elevator. The building has had two fires, and each time she has had to be carried down the stairs when the elevator shuts off.

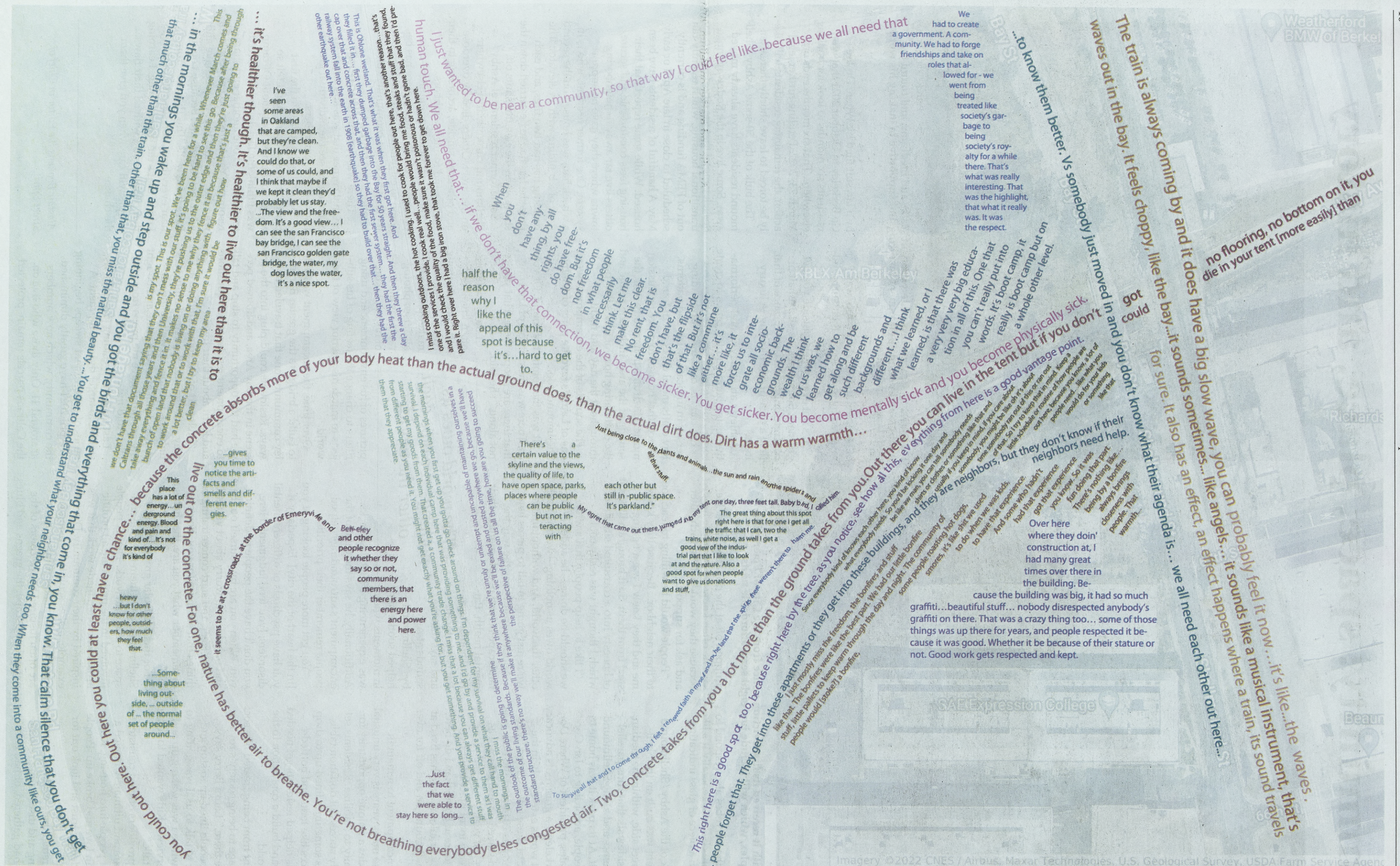
Some former residents of Ashby/Shellmound currently live elsewhere on the street. Others died by overdose and others by suicide, according to their friends and former neighbors.

The effects of an encampment eviction, particularly when a place has become so established, can cut deep. But looking back, the community continues to offer some hope.

"There was just this time period on that corner that was absolutely so amazing, to see the individual growth," Laura Berry remembers.

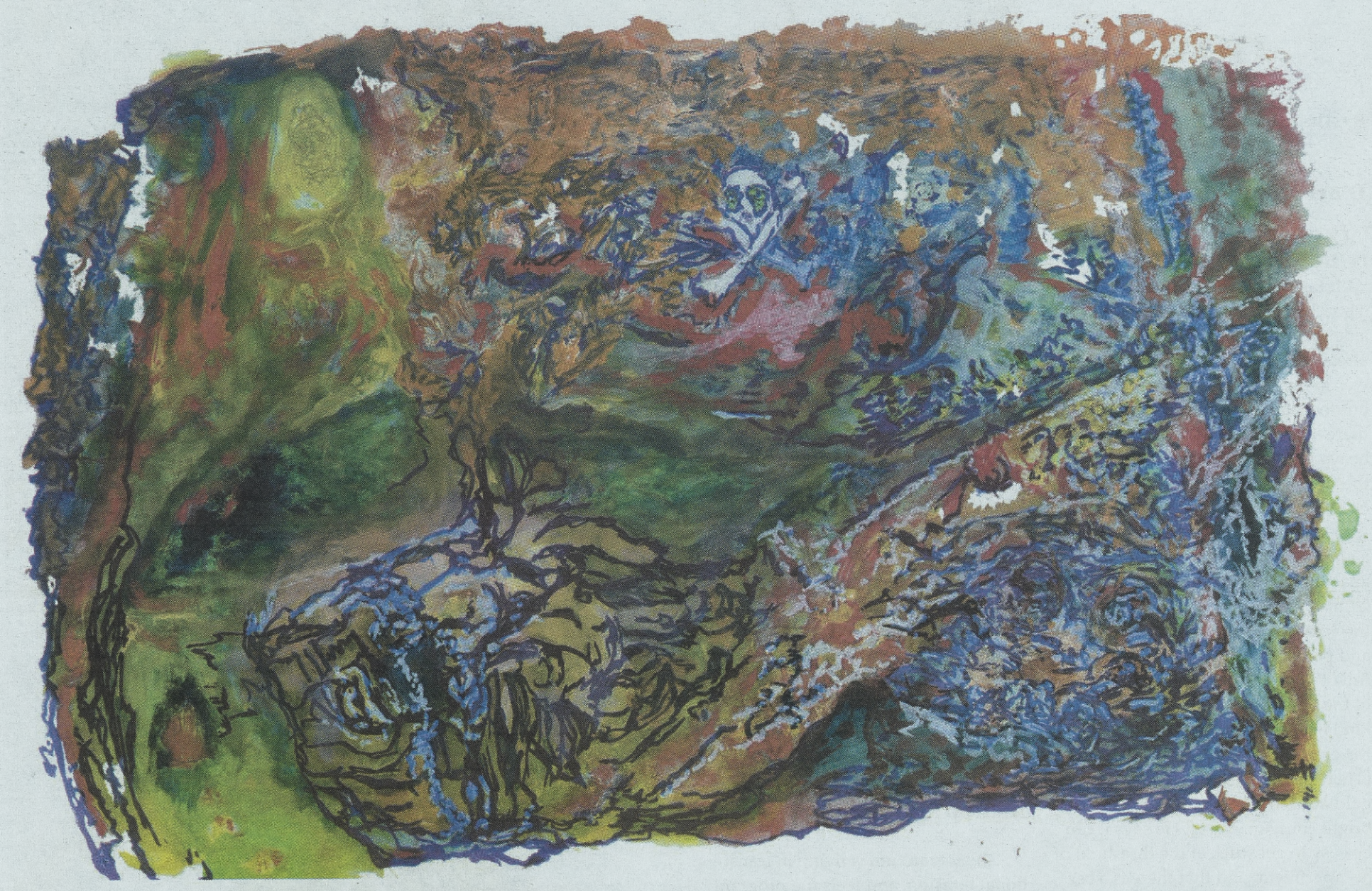
"Becoming homeless in the first place...it was so scary. And I felt so alone. So the best part about Offramp was I think the fact that you're forced to understand one another and share resources. You learn to accept people for who they are and how they behave and what their beliefs are. Because you don't have these walls. This distance. You hear everything, you see a lot of things. I think that's the biggest thing. Learning that people really, with all their flaws... people will care when you give them the chance."

Alastair Boone is the Editor in Chief of Street Spirit.



Text is comprised of quotes from each of the six participating artists. Text map created by Suzi Garner. Satellite image beneath from Google Maps, 2022.

Painted maps of Ashby/Shellmound



D'artagnan Lloyd. Personal Map of the Ashby/Shellmound encampment area with freeway exit, train route, shoreline, and poisoned lake.
Acrylic and marker on Vellum, 2021

Ashley Frankum. Personal Map of the Ashby/Shellmound encampment area with biking paths, location of tent and friends' tents, and a Pacman ghost.
Colored Pencil and Paint Markers on Vellum, 2021

Where are the artists now?

By Alastair Boone

D'art Lloyd

D'art painted on a photo of himself in his new apartment. The painting reflects on his transition indoors.

D'art Lloyd

D'ART is currently housed in Berkeley.

"It takes effort to keep up the idea of a good future, of a good now…[Outside], for many years it was like I was already at the end, is how I felt. Or I was in the thrall of living the 'good' outdoor life. Whereas now living here there's more hope." That hope can feel heavy and complicated, he says. But these days he is feeling more optimistic about his new living situation.

At our request, he painted on top of a photograph standing inside his new apartment, looking out the window. Of his painting, he says, " Looking out the window, I see like the pyramids, and people, balls bouncing, the world full of possibilities...The blue ocean of the floor that I'm standing on. It kind of washes out the door. That's the energy that I get at the apartment. [There's a] gold light outside, and the gold aura that I have. A bright future, bright consciousness." He says it can be easy to get stuck at the threshold of his apartment, and that there is a certain inertia to living indoors. But he is grateful to all the people who helped him get inside.

Ray Leichter

Ray currently lives outside.

Pat Thomas

Pat Thomas currently lives at the Rodeway Inn in Berkeley while he awaits a housing placement.

"It's been better but it's been kind of worse," he says of moving to the Rodeway. "The roadway has restrictions… I understand how that tries to re-introduce you into having a structured life again, but a lot of people want more freedom. We're all grown-ass individuals, we shouldn't have to… be restricted… It's like they don't give us trust anymore."

The Rodeway recently ran out of FEMA funding, and may close at the end of April or beginning of May. It is not clear what will happen to those who have yet to be placed.

Grimm Mercer

Grimm currently lives in the transitional housing program at the Rodeway Inn in Berkeley while he awaits a housing placement. He says the Rodeway has disrupted the sense of community they built at Ashby/Shellmound. He continues to watch out for his community and try to make sure that people are getting the resources they want and need.

"People aren't together no more... [everyone] got segregated by hotel rooms. And everybody is getting promised this or that voucher or what not, so they get all self-conscious and self-minded and they stop worrying about what the person next door wants or needs," he says.

Ashley Frankum

Ashley Frankum is living in transitional housing, and feels the program she is in is controlling and oppressive. "That's why I lived out[side]. I've had a house, I had a job, I was in school full time, I had all this stuff and I didn't want it. I didn't want to live somebody else's dream."

When we last spoke with Ashley, she was under the impression that she may be housed in a week or two. Though she expresses some excitement, she is largely lukewarm about the idea of moving indoors.

"I'm dreading it, because I don't know that that's what I want, you know?"

Laura Berry

Laura Berry is currently housed.

Alastair Boone is the Editor in Chief of Street Spirit.

Suzi Garner

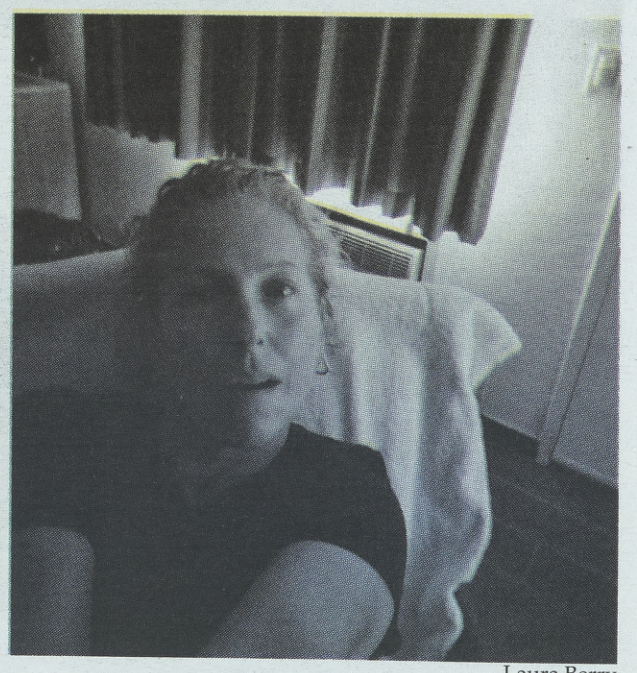
Portrait of Ashley Frankum in facepaint.

Grimm Mercer

Self-portrait of Grimm Mercer.

Suzi Garner

Pat Thomas and some of his art-making and building material.



Laura Berry

Self-portrait of Laura Berry, one in a series from when she had COVID-19..